

Reprimand for German envoy over his 'coarse' Irish speech

Charles Mallon

THE German Embassy in Ireland has moved to defuse a diplomatic row after the German Ambassador described Ireland as 'coarse' and criticised our public service system.

Christian Pauls was given a firm diplomatic reprimand over the remarks which "talked down" Ireland to an 80-strong group of potential investors. He was given the verbal rap on the knuckles by the Department of Foreign Affairs' Secretary General, Dermot Gallagher, on the explicit instructions of Minister Dermot Ahern.

He was told bluntly last Thursday morning that his remarks at a function in Clontarf Castle in Dublin to visiting German industrialists were "inaccurate, misinformed and inappropriate at a public forum".

Theme

It is understood that he insisted in the telephone conversation that the central theme of

article in the *Sunday Independent* which highlighted the incident, said matters might have been exaggerated.

"We always like to make jokes. We like that the Irish built wealth. But I have no hard copy of what he said

"Maybe he was being ironic or something like that . . . but not in a mood for insulting the Irish people. I will ask him tomorrow.

"If you felt insulted that's not the right reaction," added the spokesperson.

In his 15-minute speech the ambassador said:

- Ireland was a "coarse place".
- Junior ministers here earned more than the German Chancellor.
- Some 20pc of the population were public servants.
- Our "chaotic" hospital waiting lists would not be tolerated anywhere else.
- Wage demands were too high.
- Our immigration policy was wrong and we had learned nothing from Germany or the Nordic countries.

He also cited the doctors' rejection of €200,000 a year posts on the basis that this sum

On yer (solar-powered) bikes: friends planning worldwide trek with a difference

Shane Hickey

TWO Irishmen are planning to travel around the world using pedal power.

With 25,000km in front of them over 14 months, two Wicklow adventurers are planning to circumnavigate the globe on their bikes.

And they will be powering themselves all the way home – with solar panels on the back of their bikes energising their mobile phones, cameras and other technology.

Dubbed the 'long cycle home', friends Fearghal O'Nuallain and Simon Evans are to attempt to become the first Irishmen to go around the world on their bikes beginning the journey in January 2009.

Starting from their homes in Greystones, Co Wicklow, the pair will go through France and southern Spain first before getting a boat to South America where they will travel up to Peru and

They will be powering themselves all the way home – with solar panels on the back of their bikes

Panama and then on to Japan.

From there, the intrepid pair plan to take the trans-Siberian highway, go through Iran, Jordan, Egypt and Libya before travelling through mainland Europe and the UK back home.

It is most definitely a journey less travelled with their list of destinations including Nagasaki, Turkmenistan, Ulan Bator and Shanghai.

Mr O'Nuallain estimated that the cost of the journey will be €70,000 for the pair with most of the expense going on the technology that will mean they will be self-sufficient through energy efficiency during the journey.

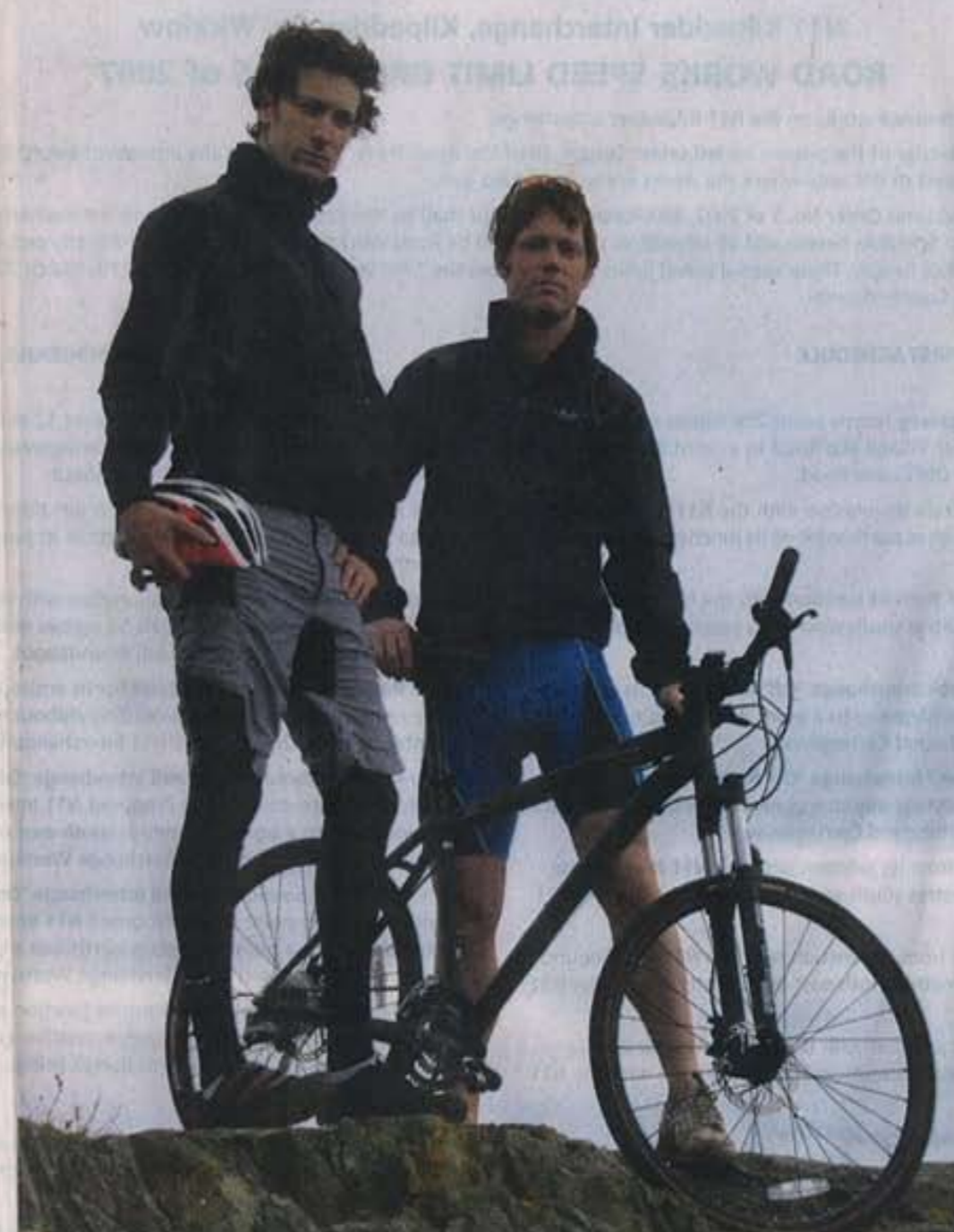
"We need to sort out bikes and equipment, but the real cost is on solar panels, fans for the bikes to generate electricity which we will use for a satellite phone and laptop which we will bring with us," he said.

"During the trip we will maintain a real time blog and shoot short videos."

Seasoned cyclists, the pair are currently undertaking a series of training expeditions which this week sees them in Egypt doing a 1,400km trek.

In addition they will tackle the highest peaks in Ireland in 24 hours as well as climbing Mont Blanc in order to get them ready for the adventure.

The expedition will be in aid of the depression charity Aware as well as to promote climate change.



The Wicklow duo will set out on their gruelling 25,000km trek around the world in January 2009.

SDLP stall on future merger with FF

Fionnan Sheahan
Political Correspondent

THE SDLP was buying time last night on the prospects of a merger with Fianna Fail at some point in the future

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern will today outline plans for Fianna Fail to organise in Northern Ireland.

The move could possibly lead to an ultimate merger with the SDLP, but is more likely to result in closer co-operation between the parties.

Such an alliance would be embarrassing for the Labour Party, as it is a sister party of the SDLP, and will also see Fianna Fail go head-to-head with Sinn Féin on both sides of the border.

Mr Ahern will outline his plans to make Fianna Fail a 32-county, all-Ireland party at the Fianna Fail parliamentary party meeting in Druid's Glen in Co Wicklow. Fianna Fail has largely resisted pressure to organise in the North until now.

Sensitive

But the setting up of a power-sharing government, headed by the DUP and Sinn Féin in the North, means the idea of expanding into the North is not as sensitive.

Fianna Fail's success against Sinn Féin in the general election has also changed the scene.

Fianna Fail sources said Mr Ahern will set out where he feels the party should be in 2016, the 100 year anniversary of the Easter Rising.